The Function of Spirituality In Addressing the Stress of Work

Rick Csiernik, Ph.D., R.S.W.
Professor
School of Social Work
King's College
University of Western Ontario
266 Epworth Avenue
London, Ontario
Canada

and

David W. Adams, M.S.W., R.S.W., C.D.E., C.G.T.
Professor Emeritus
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences
Faculty of Health Sciences
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario
Canada

contact information:

Rick Csiernik
School of Social Work
King's University College at the University of Western Ontairo
266 Epworth Avenue
London, Ontario
N6A 2M3

rcsierni@uwo.ca

Rick Csiernik and David Adams

"Work is love made visible. And if you cannot work
with love but only with distaste, it is better that
you should leave your work and sit at the gate of
the temple and take alms of those who work with joy."

Kahlil Gibran, 1965, p. 28

The role of stressful life and workplace events in creating illness has been well documented (Eakin, 1992; Hamilton-Smith, 1992; Hyatt, 2002; Karasek and Theorell, 1990, Noer, 1993; Shain, 1996, and Shehadeh and Shain, 1990). Historically, assistance to those in the workplace by formal mechanisms such as Human Resource Departments, Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) or peer support networks has focused upon psychosocial issues while physical health maintenance has been the primary target of wellness initiatives. However, the idea of wellness is more than that, it is a synthesis of five areas of health: physical, psychological, social, intellectual and spiritual (see Csiernik, 2005). Not surprisingly, spirituality has been the dimension that has been studied the least empirically and that has been the most difficult to openly discuss in the context of work. However, there has been a growing interest in what had traditionally been the most neglected aspect of wellness, and in its relationship to both work and the workplace (Adams and Csiernik, 2002a; Ambrose, 1997, Conger, et al., 1994; Hawley, 1993; Lee and Zemke, 1993; Neal, 2000). Fox (1994) has stated that work is an expression of our soul and our inner being and that our work is an expression of our spirituality. Percy (1997) has gone a step further and

compared his six stations of the inner journey which explore personal spiritual development with the spiritual journey of corporations (see also Adams and Csiernik, 2002b).

Morgan (1993) states that spirituality entails the ability to transcend the physical limits of time and space, the ability to reason, to will, be creative, and to seek meaning. Spirituality also includes our perception of ourselves, an adherence to values, of being ethical, and being connected with others, while maintaining a belief system that typically includes some religious dimension. It is an evolutionary process that necessitates a striving for transcendental values, meanings and discovering knowledge of an ultimate reality. Anderson and Worthen (1997) suggest that spirituality is premised upon three critical factors:

i)   an awareness of the existence of a supreme power or force;

ii) the innate yearning of people for connection with this divine entity; and,

iii) the belief that this power is interested in humans and acts upon this relationship in order to promote changes that benefit humans.

Downsizing, reorganization and restructuring has left many employees devoid of energy and no longer feeling connected (Laabs, 1995). During this time many organizations attempted to respond by enhancing employee participation and fostering employee empowerment. Initiatives included TQM – total quality management, quality control circles and introducing quality of

life working programs (Csiernik, 1995). Elmes and Smith (2001)
claim that empowering employees to participate in fulfilling the
mission and vision of the organization have distinct spiritual
overtones and that empowerment has a spiritual idealism that can
be also seen in Christian and utopian thinking. It is an attempt
to help reconnect.

However, there has been little empirical study of the
relationship of spirituality to the workplace or to workplace
stress. Holder and Vaux (1998) reported that spirituality had no
relationship to job satisfaction in their study of African
Americans working in predominantly White work settings. However,
we believe from the anecdotal discussions of our clients and
based upon recent qualitative work (Neal, 2000) that spirituality
is an important factor is dealing with workplace stress and is a
prominent component of wellness.

Csiernik and Adams (2002) in a study of 154 helping professionals
from seven different work environments employed five different
measures to examine the impact of stress on spirituality and of
spirituality on ameliorating workplace stress. Social workers and
nurses reported that their workplaces were the most stressful
while clergy and those working in pastoral care reported the
least amount of workplace stress. Those working in funeral homes
and churches reported the greatest negative impact on their
spirituality by the stress of their work. It was also discovered
that the greater the score on the JAREL spirituality scale the

more likely respondents were to report that their workplaces had a more positive emotional climate and produced less stress. Overall, it appeared that for this non-random sample, spirituality contributed to wellness, particularly in the workplacee.

Spirituality has historically been seen as an inner source of strength especially when dealing with uncertainty and chaos in one's personal life. That it should also help in ameliorating workplace stress and be important in one's working life should then be no surprise. However, organizations remain reluctant to incorporate the idea of spirituality into support services such as workplace wellness initiatives and Employee Assistance Programs let alone main stream programs. This is despite the supposition that "spirituality-in-business suggests that a spiritual basis for working enables workers to feel whole and complete and their organizations to prosper" (Elmes and Smith, 2001, p. 35).

Research indicates that one's spirituality does help decrease the perception of workplace stressors and thus contributes to a sense of wellness. In Csiernik and Adam's study (2002) participants who indicated a greater sense of spirituality perceived lower levels of workplace stress than less spiritually inclined colleagues. It was also interesting to note that those with a greater sense of spirituality also perceived their organizations as being healthier. Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents also indicated that workplace stress impacted

negatively upon their spiritual health. The challenge then becomes how to introduce, channel and better use spirituality in the workplace to enhance worker and workplace wellness.

REFERENCES

Adams, D.W. and Csiernik, R. (2002a). A beginning examination of the spirituality of health care practitioners. In R. Gilbert (ed.) <u>Health Care and Spirituality: Listening, Assessing, Caring</u>. Amityville, New York: Baywood Books.

Adams, D.W. and Csiernik, R. (2002b). Seeking the lost spirit: Understanding spirituality and restoring it to the workplace. *Employee Assistance Quarterly*, 17(4),

Ambrose, D. (1997). *Healing the downsized organization*. New York: Harmony Books.

Anderson,D.A. and Wortham, D.(1997). Exploring a fourth dimension: Spirituality as a resource for the couple therapist. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 23(1), 2-12.

Conger, J. (1994). *Spirit at work: Discovering the spirituality in leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Csiernik, R. (2005) *Wellness and Work.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press.

Csiernik, R. (1995). *The development of an integrated model of occupational assistance*. Toronto: University of Toronto.

Csiernik, R. and Adams, D. (2002). Spirituality, stress and work. *Employee Assistance Quarterly*, 18 (2), 29-37.

Eakin, J. (1992). Psychosocial aspects of workplace health. *Canadian Centre For Occupational Health and Safety*, April 8-10.

Elmes, M. and Smith, C. (2001). Moved by the spirit: Contextualizing workplace empowerment in American spiritual ideals. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 37(1), 33-50.

Forbes, R. (1979). *Corporate Stress*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Fox, M. (1994). *The reinvention of work: A new vision of livelihood for our time.* San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Gibran, K. (1965). *The Prophet*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Hamilton-Smith, E. (1992). Why the word wellness? In *National*

Recreation and Wellness Conference, Coburg, Australia, March 12-13.

Hawley, J. (1993). *Reawakening the spirit in work: The power of Dharmic management.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Holder, J. and Vaux, A. (1998). African American professionals: Coping with occupational stress in predominantly White work environments. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 53(3), 315-333.

Hungelmann, J.; Kenkel-Rossi, E.; Klassen, L.; and Stollenwerk, R. (1987). *JAREL Spiritual Well-Being Scale*. Milwaukee: Marquette University College of Nursing.

Hyatt, L. (2002). Job stress: Have we reached the breaking point? *Workplace Today*, January, 14-16; 37.

Karasek, R. and Theorell, T. (1990). *Healthy work: Stress, productivity and reconstruction of working life.* New York: Basic Books.

Laabs, J. (1995). Balancing spirituality and work. *Personnel Journal*, January, 60-76.

Lee, C. and Zemke, R. (1993). The search for spirit in the workplace. *Training*, June, 21-28 .

Neal, J. (2000). Work as service to the Divine. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(8), 1316-1333.

Noer, D. (1993). *Healing the wounds: Overcoming the trauma of layoffs and revitalizing downsized organizations.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Morgan, J.D. (1993). The existential quest for meaning. In K. Doka and J.D. Morgan (eds.) *Death and Spirituality*. Amityville, New York: Baywood Books.

Peele, S. (1988). *How Healthy is Your Workplace*? Morristown, New Jersey: Organizational Health Systems.

Percy, I. (1997). *Exploring Spirituality: Going deep In life and leadership*. Toronto: MacMillan Canada.

Shain, M. (1996). Employee assistance and organizational change: New evidence, new challenges, new standards? *Employee Assistance Quarterly, 12(1), 1-13.*

Shehadeh, V. and Shain, M. (1990). *Influences on wellness in the workplace: A multivariate approach.* Ottawa: Health and Welfare Canada.